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ABSTRACT

The concept paper prepared by the American Geological Institute (AGI) Committee on Geoscience Information is evaluated and areas which need more detailed plans if the geoscience community is to be persuaded of the need for a library network are discussed. For example: the concept plan does not display adequate awareness or concern for the role of the geoscience libraries within the information system. Two complementary actions which might help to remedy this deficiency are suggested: (1) the libraries might embark on a program of establishing their position within the information system and (2) librarians should be sought out wherever the libraries have the potential as information handlers or interrelationships exist or are apt to be created. It is proposed that the next step is a document which reaches some conclusions and which will provide the point of departure on action and discussion. (Author/NH)

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# A LIBRARY NETWORK FOR THE GEOSCIENCES

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The concept paper[1] prepared by the AGI Committee on Geoscience Information which we are discussing cannot easily be faulted. It is a rational market list of basic information elements and shows a progress in geoscience not yet even considered in most other disciplines. Even so, there is a pronounced breeziness in the handling of the immensely complex information problems. This will have to be translated into more certain and realistic statements before acceptance or commitment will be forthcoming. I do not oppose such a document, in fact, within the past two years I was involved in writing one not unlike it. I am sure that the Committee on Geoscience Information was faced with the same basic question: How can one transmit to the geoscience community at large, an adequate amount of information on the problem and its possible solution without having it thrown in the wastebasket. The solution employed is probably the best one, although I feel it is too brief for those who are going to look at it seriously.

But to be more specific. The epigrammatic references to a Library Network (p. 10 & 15) amount to 24 typed lines. The content of those 24 lines is not great. This points up a major problem to be faced by a discipline-oriented library network: Visibility within the discipline, and an adequate hearing on the role of libraries in an information system. This lack of awareness of libraries' interrelationships,

needs and payoffs with the other elements in the geoscience plan (bibliographic control, data bases, thesauri, translations and vocabularies) must be corrected.

I will not attempt to persuade you of the essentiality of geoscience libraries in transfering information today or in the future except by making these observations:

- Society can ill afford an unbalanced and disparate information system in geoscience, for that matter, probably in any discipline. All major functioning units should proceed roughly at the same pace.
- Society has decreed upon libraries the role of a major information handler; I see few shifts of responsibility in the scientific community.
- The organization of libraries, their distributed locations, and the immense investments in them provide the continuity, the single-agent approach, and the visibility which any information system needs.
- Two information networks or systems at the national level, in medicine and agriculture, have faced these same questions and have placed their national libraries as the nuclei.

To restate my point: Your concept plan does not display adequate awareness or concern for the role of the geoscience libraries. Two complementary actions might help to remedy this deficiency.

The libraries might embark on a program of establishing their generally recognized, but usually unheralded, position within the information system. This could be accomplished in a variety of ways, but one example of an immediate opportunity will suffice. The user-geoscientist with political acumen should be involved with the librarian in afixing the place of libraries in the information system.

The very basic Analytical Study on Geoscience Library Resources and Services[2] accomplished by the joint COSI Working Group did not have a user of library services as a member or the Dean of a university. Although the Study might have been slowed by such representation, the library community probably would have been greatly aided by additional understanding and visibility within its user community. The Study should be the first of a series of systematic projects concerning libraries, information transfer, and geoscience; so, the opportunities still exist. Although this process of education by committee may be painful to all parties, it is probably the best method to pull uncommunicating parties together for agreement, understanding and political and technical progress.

On the part of the geoscience information community, a converse arrangement should be instituted, if it does not now exist. Wherever the libraries have the potential as information handlers, interrelationships exist or are apt to be created, get the librarians involved. Most librarians will not force themselves into unwanted councils. My experience has been that they have much to give in technical and operational areas if sought out.

The Analytical Study prepared at the behest of the Committee on Geoscience Information is an excellent single piece of the whole cloth that needs to be stitched together before a library network can be even partially realized. It is evident from the Study that the Working Group understands geoscience libraries well, and their problems. It is also evident from this Study and from knowing geoscience information people that you possess the talent to bring about a strong libraries component.

However, it seems unlikely that the many concerns of the Study will receive more than a polite and cursory acknowledgement from the power and money structures unless a more systematic effort is undertaken. The two national offices recommended in the Study are intended, of course, to provide this systematic effort. I doubt that the scope and funding of either office will begin to match the tasks at hand unless a more forceful point is made in the beginning. This first major effort probably should be accomplished conjunctively by the Geoscience Information Society, the American Geological Institute, the Geological Society of America, the U.S. Geological Survey, and appropriate libraries. One cannot wish a library network into existence, nor even create it by saying, "We acknowledge it as part of our larger information system."

What I find lacking is the hard-nosed consideration by users of information and librarians of the information needs of their different communities stated in terms of how a library network might satisfy them. These should be substantiated by empirical data, statistical justification if it exists, and any other form of proof. Numerous library networks exist from which one can extract supposed, real and planned advantages. Are they analogous to geoscience? If your problems are relatively similar, can your solutions be of a similar nature? Will you force the network to solve problems not easily handled by it?

These and related matters cannot quickly be set on paper; years of effort are necessary for absolute or complete answers. But a few

more detailed plans are necessary now. In persuading the geoscience community of the need for a library network, numerous unanswered questions will press for attention and someone must have reasoned and knowledgeable solutions. I propose that the next step is a document which reaches some conclusions and which will provide the point of departure on action and discussion. Basic considerations I would include in order to crystalize thinking are these.

- Specify your user clientele as well as the intended membership of the network. Will you serve undergraduates studying geology in an unaccredited college? Will you attempt to scale your services to sized communities and distance, and establish benchmarks for the escalation of services?

- Specify your network objectives and philosophy for attaining them. The sure way to loose support and participation is not to have a fairly clear picture of where you are going and how you would like to get there.

- Translate these objectives into specific functions and tasks. Try to get a consensus on their relative importance and sequence of implementation. Think imaginatively and realistically as to where you are and what you want the network to do.

- Determine what organizational structure is apt to work best for planning, for control, and for maximum participation of members. Will it involve continuing Federal subsidy? If so, how must the members meet this strong influence?

- How will the libraries network fit into the total geoscience information system? Can you carve out an area and stay within it? Should you? Is the system structure compatible with the objectives and methods of the libraries net?

- State in general terms those technological, social and economic factors that may momentarily be sidelined, but

> which will demand awareness later. Telecommunications is one of these and should be addressed, at least in terms of a cognizance of its coming influences on library networks.

This document would then be used as a rallying point not only within the libraries involved, but more so among the user and society communities.

Formal library networks with strong requirements and benefits are coming and I think most librarians feel this trend although known by different names and having varying interpretations. We need not begin by attempting to place a satellite in space for network communications, as has been suggested. Establish your sights realistically and on a time scale which will move you forward. Free your good people for planning since you will need them. And by all means, get the user community involved and convert it to a happy customer so that you can all be benefited.

## References and Resource Documents


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